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C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000367

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [PDEM](#)

SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH IECI HEAD PREPARED FOR FRAUD ACCUSATIONS

REF: HILLAH 0361

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AL-HILLAH, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Summary: Diwaniyah Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq Head Saad Madhloom told REO Al-Hillah staff in a December 7 meeting that he was staffing provincial polling sites to prepare for allegations of fraud from partisans of Iyad Allawi's National Iraqi List (ballot number 731.) Madhloom said that all of his administrative and logistical preparations for the December 15 election were complete, but reported that the intensity of the current campaign, in which tearing down posters had become "natural in every province," could dangerously escalate sectarian tensions. End summary.

2. (C) Madhloom, a highly respected election official often sent to other provinces to troubleshoot their election procedures, said that the current election was a "critical situation." The existence in Diwaniyah of 68 coalitions running 375 candidates, Madhloom related, meant that guaranteeing a free and fair election was profoundly difficult. Each coalition has the right to place an observer in each polling station, Madhloom reported, meaning that with election workers and others, as many as 100 Iraqis could be inside a polling station at a given time, not counting voters. "The fact is we can't prevent [the presence of the observers,]" Madhloom related. "At the same time we expect that this will cause many troubles."

3. (C) Of particular concern, according to Madhloom, were reports that Allawi partisans would attempt to entrap IECI workers in fraud. He said that he had heard that 731 voters would enter polling stations claiming to be illiterate, and ask the worker to help them vote for the Allawi list. When the IECI representative surreptitiously marked a vote for the rival United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, ballot number 555), the Allawi voter would cry foul. Another version would have the partisan simply asking the IECI worker to check the 555 box, and then crying foul, the partisan claiming that he had wanted to vote 731. Madhloom said that to counter this eventuality, he was assigning three workers at each ballot box to witness votes cast by illiterate voters.

4. (C) In spite of his concerns, Madhloom reported that he was prepared for the elections in every possible way. The security plan was in place, he reported, and he predicted a safe and secure election, although he did repeat a familiar complaint that the local security forces had appropriated many of his "T-wall" and "jersey" barriers, barbed wire, and other protective equipment. He said that his staff had prepared their own updated alphabetical voter registration lists, in response to widespread problems caused by unalphabetized lists in the October 15 referendum. And he offered that newly-registered voters would be permitted to visit their polling sites for three days prior to the vote to insure that they were registered. This step, which he said the Baghdad IECI had authorized, was intended to eliminate any confusion and delays on polling day.

5. (C) Although he evinced satisfaction with his role in the election preparation, Madhloom shared his grave concerns about the conduct of the campaigns. There were "many unacceptable actions," he related, citing the universal tearing down of rival campaign posters. "This has become a natural thing in every province," he maintained. Madhloom also mentioned the shooting of an Allawi worker hanging posters and a grenade attack on another Allawi office, both in the West Diwaniyah town of Shamiya (reftel.) Madhloom lamented the harsh sectarian tone of campaigns nationwide, and described pro-Sunni literature calling the Shi'a "Iranians" and pro-Shi'a pamphlets branding the Sunni "Wahabbis." "It's turned into a sectarian war," he observed.
FONTENEAU